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Book Ball

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OF THE

BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL.

WRITTEN FOR THE FORT FOLIO, AT THE REQUEST OF THE EDITOR.

BY H. DEARBORN, MAJ. GEN. U. S. A.

ILLUSTRATED BY A MAP

DRAWN BY HENRY DE BERNIERE, TENTH ROYAL BRITISH INFANTRY;

AND CORRECTED BY GEN. DEARBORN.



PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED BY HARRISON HALL, NO. 133 CHESNUT STREET.

J. Maxwell, Printer.

1818.

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DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA, to wit:

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the 1st day of February, in the forty-second year of the independence of the United States of America, A. D. 1818, HARRISON HALL, of the said district, hath deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following, to wit:

An Account of the Battle of Bunker Hill. Written for the Port Folio, at the request of the Editor. By H. Dearborn, Maj. Gen. U. S. A. Illustrated by a Map drawn by Henry de Bernier, tenth Royal British Infantry; and corrected by Gen. Dearborn.

In conformity to the Act of Congress of the United States entitled, "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned." And also to the act, entitled, "An act supplementary to an act entitled "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints.

DAVID CALDWELL, Clerk of the District of Pennsylvania.

116256

INTRODUCTION.

TO this action, so memorable in the annals of our country, the attention of the editor was attracted by the following article, which appeared not long since in a village journal:*

"I stepped into the house of a friend the other evening, and he told me that in rummaging over some old drawers, he found a curiosity. It was indeed very interesting and curious, to me at least; I dare say it would be so to you, reader. The thing referred to was a view or plan of the battle of Bunker's Hill, taken by a British officer at the time, who was in the engagement. The execution was in a style of uncommon neatness: and as far as it was possible for me to judge, extremely and minutely accurate. The references were numerous and particular. The place of landing of the British was laid down-each regiment numbered-the artillery and light infantry particularly designated—the precise line of march pointed out—the situation of the American posts of defence: even to a barn, and particular force that attacked the barn laid down, the place of the greatest carnage or loss of the British—the vessels that were moored to annoy our people the battery that played upon our fortifications—the line of retreat, and the situation of the craft stationed to cut off our troops; the situation of the commanding officer of the British; and indeed every thing that could tend to give a full and clear idea of the situation and movements of the parties. On looking over this map, deep and strong emotions were excited pride, at the glorious defence made by our undisciplined American yeomanry against the best regular forces of the old world-patriotism, by considering the spirit and devotion of our militia in defence of freedom and their country—pity for the suffering of the number who fell, and admiration of the dauntless spirit of the assailants and the assailed. At the same time it was impossible to repress the smile—half in anger and half in mirth -at the repetition of the word "REBELS," which occurred so often in the

^{* &}quot;The Gleaner," published at Wilkesbarre, by Charles Miner, Esq.

delineation. It brought to our minds "the battle of kegs," where the frequent use of the odious and contemptible expression is so handsomely ridiculed.

"This probably is the only accurate plan of that memorable battle in existence. It ought certainly to be engraved, and the copies multiplied, together with a correct account of the engagement, and to be in the possession of every friend to the liberties of the country."

The very interesting document, which is here so well described as to leave nothing to be added by us, was found, upon inquiry, in the possession of Jacob Cist, Esq. of Wilkesbarre, who readily put it into our hands, for the purpose suggested in the preceding extract. An engraving was accordingly prepared by Mr. Fairman; and as it was desirable that it should receive every advantage of which it is susceptible, a proof-sheet was submitted to g neral Dearborn. This gentleman has indicated a few errors, which, with his approbation, we have corrected (in red) without removing what appeared to him amiss; as it was deemed unnecessary to disturb the original. We are also indebted to him for the account of the battle which we are about to present to our readers. This memoir contains the most minute and particular view of these transactions that has yet appear-Taken in conjunction with the Notes of general D. and the Map, which is copied from the original, in our possession, we are authorised by this officer to state, that it presents "a clear and satisfactory" view of the subject. It is entitled to great respect, as the evidence of one who bore a part in that gallant struggle, and who has resided, from his earliest days, in the vicinity of the ground, where

The martyr's glory crown'd the soldier's fight-

The fervid pen of one of our most popular writers has recently described

The backward mutters of dissevering power

which Henry, in these portentous times, was pouring from the South: in the battle of Bunker Hill we shall find the torch of civil liberty scattering its lights through the regions of the North.

THE

BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL.

On the sixteenth of June, 1775, it was determined that a fortified post should be established at or near Bunker's Hill.

A detachment of the army was ordered to advance early in the evening of that day, and commence the erection of a strong work on the heights in the rear of Charlestown, at that time called Breed's Hill, but from its proximity to Bunker Hill, the battle has taken its name from the latter eminence, which overlooks it.

The work was commenced and carried on under the direction of such engineers as we were able to procure, at that time. It was a square redoubt, the curtains of which were about sixty or seventy feet in extent, with an entrenchment, or breast work, extending fifty or sixty feet from the northern angle, towards Mystic river.

In the course of the night the ramparts had been raised to the height of six or seven feet, with a small ditch at their base, but it was yet in a rude and very imperfect state. Being in full view from the northern heights of Boston, it was discovered by the enemy, as soon as day-light appeared, and a determination was immediately formed by general Gage, for dislodging our troops from this new and alarming position. Arrangements were promptly made for effecting this important object. The movements of the British troops, indicating an attack, were soon discovered; in consequence of which, orders were immediately issued for the march of a considerable part of our army to reinforce the detachment at the redoubts on Breed's Hill; but such was the imperfect state of discipline, the want of knowledge in military science, and the deficiency of the materials of war, that the movement

of the troops was extremely irregular and devoid of every thing like concert—each regiment advancing according to the opinions, feelings, or caprice, of its commander.

Colonel Stark's* regiment was quartered in Medford, distant about four miles from the point of anticipated attack. It then consisted of thirteen companies, and was probably the largest regiment in the army. About ten o'clock in the morning he received orders to march. The regiment being destitute of ammunition, it was formed in front of a house occupied as an arsenal, where each man received a gill-cup full of powder, fifteen balls, and one flint.

The several captains were then ordered to march their companies to their respective quarters, and make up their powder and ball into cartridges, with the greatest possible despatch. As there were scarcely two muskets in a company of equal caliber, it was necessary to reduce the size of the balls for many of them; and as but a small proportion of the men had cartridge boxes, the remainder made use of powder horns and ball pouches.

After completing the necessary preparations for action, the regiment formed, and marched about one o'clock. When it reached Charlestown Neck, we found two regiments halted, in consequence of a heavy enfilading fire thrown across it, of round, bar, and chain shot, from the Lively frigate, and floating batteries anchored in Charles river, and a floating battery laying in the river Mystic. Major M'Clary went forward, and observed to the commanders, if they did not intend to move on, he wished them to open and let our regiment pass: the latter was immediately done. My company being in front, I marched by the side of col Stark, who, moving with a very deliberate pace, I suggested the propriety of quickening the march of the regiment, that it might sooner be relieved from the galling cross fire of the enemy. With a look peculiar to himself, he fixed his eyes upon me, and observed with great composure, "Dearborn—one fresh man in action is worth

* This distinguished veteran is still alive, in the ninety-first year of his age, and resides in the state of New Hampshire.

He is one of the only three surviving general officers of the revolutionary war. The other two are major general St. Clair, who lives in the interior of Pennsylvania, and brigadier general Huntington, of Connecticut.

ten fatigued ones," and continued to advance in the same cool and collected manner. When we reached the top of Bunker's Hill, where general Putnam had taken his station, the regiment halted for a few moments for the rear to come up.

Soon after, the enemy were discovered to have landed on the shore of Morton's point, in front of Breed's Hill, under cover of a tremendous fire of shot and shells from a battery on Copp's Hill, in Boston, which had opened on the redoubt at day-break.

Major general *Howe*, and brigadier general *Pigot*, were the commanders of the British forces which first landed, consisting of four battalions of infantry, ten companies of grenadiers, and ten of light infantry, with a train of field artillery. They formed as they disembarked, but remained in that position, until they were reinforced by another detachment.

At this moment the veteran and gallant colonel Stark harangued his regiment in a short but animated address; then directed them to give three cheers, and make a rapid movement to the rail fence which ran from the left, and about forty yards in the rear of the redoubt towards Mystic river. Part of the grass having been recently cut, lay in winnows and cocks on the field Another fence was taken up—the rails run through the one in front, and the hay, mown in the vicinity, suspended upon them, from the bottom to the top, which had the appearance of a breast work, but was, in fact, no real cover to the men; it however served as a deception on the enemy. This was done by the direction of the "committee of safety," of which Wm. Winthrop, esq., who then, and now lives in Cambridge, was one, as he has within a few years informed me.

At the moment our regiment was formed in the rear of the rail fence, with one other small regiment from New Hampshire, under the command of colonel Reid, the fire commenced between the left wing of the British army, commanded by general Howe, and the troops in the redoubt under colonel Prescott, while a column of the enemy was advancing on our left, on the shore of Mystic river, with an evident intention of turning our left wing, and that veteran and most excellent regiment of Welsh fusileers, so distinguished for its gallant conduct in the battle of Minden, advanced in column directly on the rail fence; when within eighty or an hun-

dred yards, displayed into line, with the precision and firmness of troops on parade, and opened a brisk but regular fire by platoons, which was returned by a well directed, rapid, and fatal discharge from our whole line.

The action soon became general, and very heavy from right to left. In the course of ten or fifteen minutes the enemy gave way at all points, and retreated in great disorder; leaving a large number of dead and wounded on the field.

The firing ceased for a short time, until the enemy again formed, advanced and recommenced a spirited fire from his whole line. Several att mpts were again made to turn our left, but the troops having thrown up a slight stone wall on the bank of the river and laying down behind it, gave such a deadly fire, as cut down almost every man of the party opposed to them; while the fire from the redoubt and the rail fence was so well directed and so fatal, especially to the British officers, that the whole army was compelled a second time to retreat with precipitation and great confusion. At this time the ground occupied by the enemy was covered with his dead and wounded. Only a few small detached parties again advanced, which kept up a distant ineffectual scattering fire, until a strong reinforcement arrived from Boston which advanced on the southern declivity of the hill, in the rear of Charlestown. When this column arrived opposite that angle of the redoubt which faced Charlestown, it wheeled by platoons to the right and advanced directly upon the redoubt without firing a gun. By this time our ammunition was exhausted. A few men only had a charge left.

The advancing column made an attempt to carry the redoubt by assault, but at the first onset every man that mounted the parapet was cut down, by the troops within, who had formed on the opposite side, not being prepared with bayonets to meet a charge.

The column wavered for a moment, but soon formed again; when a forward movement was made with such spirit and intrepidity as to render the feeble efforts of a handful of men, without the means of defence, unavailing, and they fled through an open space, in the rear of the redoubt, which had been left for a gateway. At this moment the rear of the British column advanced round the angle of the redoubt and threw in a galling flank fire upon our troops, as they rushed from it, which killed and wounded

a greater number than had fallen before during the action. The whole of our line immediately after gave away and retreated with rapidity and disorder towards Bunker Hill; carrying off as many of the wounded as possible, so that only thirty six or seven fell into the hands of the enemy, among whom were *Lt. Col. Parker* and two or three other officers who fell in or near the redoubt.

When the troops arrived at the summit of Bunker Hill, we found Gen. Putnam with nearly as many men as had been engaged in the battle; notwithstanding which no measures had been taken for reinforcing us, nor was there a shot fired to cover our retreat, or any movement made to check the advance of the enemy to this height, but on the contrary Gen. Putnam rode off, with a number of spades and pick-axes in his hands and the troops that had remained with him inactive, during the whole of the action, although within a few hundred yards of the battle ground and no obstacle to impede their movement but musket balls.

The whole of the troops now descended the northwestern declivity of Bunker Hill and recrossed the neck. Those of the New Hampshire line retired towards Winter Hill, and the others on to Prospect Hill.

Some slight works were thrown up in the course of the evening, —strong advance pickets were posted on the roads leading to Charlestown, and the troops anticipating and attack, rested on their arms.

It is a most extraordinary fact that the British did not make a single charge during the battle, which, if attempted, would have been decisive and fatal to the Americans, as they did not carry into the field fifty bayonets. In my company there was not one.

Soon after the commencement of the action a detachment from the British force in Boston was landed in Charlestown and within a few moments the whole town appeared in a blaze. A dense column of smoke rose to a great height and there being a gentle breeze from the south west, it hung like a thunder cloud over the contending armies.—A very few houses escaped the dreadful conflagration of this devoted town.

From similar mistakes, the fixed ammunition furnished for the field-pieces was calculated for guns of a larger caliber, which prevented the use of field artillery on both sides. There was no cavalry

in either army. From the ships of war and the large battery on Copp's Hill a heavy cannonade was kept up upon our line and redoubt, from the commencement to the close of the action, and during the retreat; but with very little effect; except that of killing the brave Major Andrew McClary of Col. Stark's regiment soon after we retired from Bunker Hill. He was among the first officers of the army. Possessing a sound judgment, of undaunted bravery,—enterprising, ardent and zealous, both as a patriot and soldier. His loss was severely felt by his compatriots in arms, while his country was deprived of the services of one of her most promising and distinguished champions of liberty.

After leaving the field of battle I met him and drank some spirit and water with him. He was animated and sanguine in the result of the conflict for Independence, from the glorious display of valor, which had distinguished his countrymen on that ever memorable day.

He soon observed that the British troops on Bunker Hill appeared in motion and said he would go and reconnoitre them, to see whether they were coming out over the neck, at the same time directing me to march my company down the road towards Charlestown. We were then at Tuft's house near *Ploughed Hill*. I immediately made a forward movement to the position he directed me to take, and halted while he proceeded to the old pound, which stood on the site now occupied as a tavern-house not far from the entrance to the neck. After he had satisfied himself that the enemy did not intend to leave their strong posts on the heights, he was returning towards me, and when within twelve or fifteen rods of where I stood, with my company, a random cannon-shot, from one of the frigates laying near where the centre of Craige's bridge now is, passed directly through his body and put to flight one of the most heroic souls that ever animated man.

He leaped two or three feet from the ground, pitched forward, and fell dead upon his face.—I had him carried to Medford where he was interred, with all the respect and honours we could exhibit to the manes of a great and good man. He was my bosom friend; we had grown up together on terms of the greatest intimacy and I loved him as a brother.

My position in the battle, more the result of accident, than any

regularity of formation, was on the right of the line, at the rail fence, which afforded me a fair view of the whole scene of action.

Our men were intent on cutting down every officer whom they could distinguish in the British line. When any of them discovered one he would instantly exclaim "there," "see that officer," "let us have a shot at him," when two or three would fire at the same moment; and as our soldiers were excellent marksmen and rested their muskets over the fence, they were sure of their object. An officer was discovered to mount near the position of Gen. Howe, on the left of the British line and ride towards our left; which a column was endeavouring to turn. This was the only officer on horse-back during the day and as he approached the rail fence, I heard a number of our men observe, "there," "there," "see that officer on horseback,"-" let us fire," "no, not yet,"-" wait until he gets to that little knoll,"-" now"-when they fired and he instanly fell dead, from his horse. It proved to be Major Pitcairn,—a distinguished officer.—The fire of the enemy was so badly directed, I should presume that forty-nine balls out of fifty passed from one to six feet over our heads, for I noticed an apple tree, some paces in the rear, which had scarcely a ball in it, from the ground as high as a man's head, while the trunk and branches above were literally cut to pieces.

I commanded a full company in action and had only one man killed and five wounded, which was a full average of the loss we sustained, excepting those who fell while sallying from the redoubt, when it was stormed by the British column.

Our total loss in killed was eighty-eight, and as well as I can recollect upwards of two hundred wounded. Our platoon officers carried fusees.

In the course of the action, after firing away what ammunition I had, I walked on to the higher ground to the right, in rear of the redoubt with an expectation of procuring from some of the dead or wounded men who lay there, a supply. While in that situation I saw at some distance a dead man lying near a small locust tree. As he appeared to be much better dressed than our men generally were, I asked a man who was passing me, if he knew who it was. He replied "it is Doctor Warren."

I did not personally know Doctor Warren, but was well acquainted with his public character. He had been recently appointed a General in our service, but had not taken any command. He was President of the Provincial Congress then sitting in Watertown, and having heard that there would probably be an action, had come to share in whatever might happen, in the character of a volunteer and was unfortunately killed early in the action. His death was a severe misfortune to his friends and country. Posterity will appreciate his worth and do honour to his memory. He is immortalized as a patriot, who gloriously fell in the defence of freedom.

The number of our troops in action as near as I was able to ascertain did not exceed fifteen hundred. The force of the British, at the commencement of the action, was estimated at about the same number, but they were frequently reinforced.

Had our ammunition held out, or had we been supplied with only fifteen or twenty rounds, I have no doubt but that we should have killed and wounded the greatest part of their army, and compelled the remainder to have laid down their arms; for it was with the greatest difficulty that they were brought up the last time. Our fire was so deadly, particularly to the officers, that it would have been impossible to have resisted it, but for a short time longer.

I did not see a man quit his post during the action, and do not believe a single soldier, who was brought into field fled, until the whole army was obliged to retreat, for want of powder and ball.

The total loss of the British was about twelve hundred; upwards of five hundred killed and between six and seven hundred wounded. The Welch fusileers suffered most severely; they came into action five hundred strong, and all were killed or wounded but eighty-three.

I will mention an extraordinary circumstance to show how far the temporary reputation of a man may affect the minds of all classes of society.

General Putnam had entered our army at the commencement of the revolutionary war, with such an universal popularity as can scarcely now be conceived, even by those who then felt the whole

force of it, and no one can at this time offer any satisfactory reasons why he was held in such high estimation.

In the battle of Bunker Hill he took post on the declivity towards Charlestown Neck, where I saw him on horseback as we passed on to Breed's Hill, with Col. Gerrish by his side. I heard the gallant Col. Prescott (who commanded in the redoubt) observe, after the war, at the table of his Excellency James Boudoin, then Governor of this Commonwealth, "that he sent three messengers during the battle to Gen. Putnam, requesting him to come forward and take the command, there being no general officer present, and the relative rank of the Colonel not having been settled; but that he received no answer, and his whole conduct was such, both during the action and the retreat, that he ought to have been shot." He remained at or near the top of Bunker Hill until the retreat, with colonel Gerrish by his side: I saw them together when we retreated. He not only continued at that distance himself during the whole of the action, but had a force with him nearly as large as that engaged. No reinforcement of men or ammunition was sent to our assistance; and, instead of attempting to cover the retreat of those who had expended their last shot in the face of the enemy, he retreated in company with colonel Gerrish, and his whole force, without discharging a single musket; but what is still more astonishing, colonel Gerrish was arrested for cowardice, tried, cashiered, and universally execrated; while not a word was said against the conduct of general Putnam, whose extraordinary popularity alone saved him, not only from trial, but even from censure. Colonel Gerrish commanded a regiment, and should have been at its head. His regiment was not in action, although ordered; but as he was in the suite of the general, and appeared to be in the situation of adjutant general, why was he not directed by Putnam to join it, or the regiment sent into action under the senior officer present with it?

When general Putnam's ephemeral and unaccountable popularity subsided or faded away, and the minds of the people were released from the shackles of a delusive trance, the circumstances relating to Bunker Hill were viewed and talked of in a very different light, and the selection of the unfortunate colonel Gerrish as a scape-goat, considered as a mysterious and inexplicable event.

Note 4. The cannon on Morton's Point are represented as firing. Not a shot was fired from those pieces. The fixed ammunition sent with them was for larger cannon, and therefore could not be used.

Note 5. The "breast work" was simply a "rail fence," with "hay" hung on it. There were no "pickets," or "stones," except on the beach, at the extreme left, where a slight stone wall was thrown up during the action. There were no "cannon" at the "rail fence," or in action any where.

Note 6. The ship K, instead of being in that position, was where a red ship is placed, which, with the floating battery, kept up a fire across the Neck, when the Americans went over it, and on their retreat.

Note 7. There was but one gondala, or floating battery, where two are placed—the other was in Mystic river, as marked with red.

Note 8. There were no "rebels" in action except those at the "rail fence" and in the "redoubt." There were no trees on the whole peninsula, except some half a dozen locusts, as many soverns, and a few apple trees. It appears by the plan that there were rows of trees on each side of the road, all over Bunker and Breed's Hills, and most of the peninsula;—they should be left out.

Note 9. There were no American troops at P, and the grenadiers were opposite the left of the "rail fence."

The red W is where general Warren was killed, early in the action, near a small locust tree, where I saw him laying just before the redoubt was stormed.

Breed's Hill, in the plan, is called "Bunker Hill." I have marked them both with red ink. The redoubt is on Breed's Hill.

The red lines G P, over the breast work marked T, thrown up by the British after the retreat, are where the troops under general Putnam took post, and which did not go into action, but remained there during the whole time, and retreated with those who had been engaged.

+ This mark is where Pitcairn was killed as he was going from the left of the British line, as marked with red, with orders from general Howe for the light infantry, on the shore of Mystic river.

RS. These red lines, in rear of the rail fence, mark the position of Stark's and Reid's regiments.

The troops in the redoubt were commanded by colonel Prescott.

Boston, 27th December, 1817.































